



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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DROUGHT HAMPERS DUCK NESTING EFFORTS

Drought again has driven large numbers of ducks from the most productive portion of their North American breeding range--the prairie pothole region. As a result, the threat of another duck crop failure looms for 1961, the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior said today.

The overall status of the duck breeding population this year and its distribution pattern are not yet entirely clear. In Canada, only the aerial survey flights in the southern half of the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have been completed. Only preliminary reports have been received from three survey teams further north. One crew is in Alaska, a second crew is covering northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories, while the third crew is working northern Saskatchewan, northern Manitoba, and Ontario.

These northern surveys are still in progress. Until they are completed, the final report on the 1961 duck breeding population will not be available. However, from the information received so far, it appears that the breeding population is about the same as it was a year ago. Apparently, it is smaller than the one which was present at the start of the nesting season in 1959.

The unfortunate factor is that, as it was in 1959, the lack of water in the Canadian prairie pothole region has driven the ducks elsewhere. In 1959 they moved northward and there was little production from these displaced birds.

Survey data this year reveal the mallard population in the southern portions of the three Prairie Provinces is 55% below the peak of 1958. Pintail ducks are down 79% from a peak in 1956.

The outlook is poor for many ducks still trying to nest in the prairie pothole region. Water levels are below those that existed in 1959 when drought disrupted duck production there. Unless there is considerable rain, a higher proportion of the existing ponds will go dry than did two years ago. If this happens, the chances of survival of the ducklings there will be poor.

Reports from the surveys in the Dakotas-Minnesota duck nesting area reveal the number of birds there is not much changed from last year but is up considerably over 1959. However, the number of water areas is less than two years ago at this stage of the breeding season. Many ducks in this area were in groups of mixed sexes and did not appear to be nesting.

The preliminary information from the far north is as follows:

The crew operating in Alaska reports no change in breeding ducks of species important to hunters. The crew in northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories says ducks, which are normally prairie nesters, are up considerably. The crew flying northern Saskatchewan, northern Manitoba, and in Ontario voices the possibility that the overall duck nesting population will be down from 1960 levels.

The duck nesting areas will be flown again in July by the survey teams. The brood count made then will reveal the kind of duck flight which will take place next fall.

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